

JAMES OBERWETTER'S SELECTION TO BE U.S. AMBASSADOR TO SAUDI ARABIA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I am deeply disappointed by the President's choice of James Oberwetter to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. My disappointment does not stem from doubts about Mr. Oberwetter's integrity or professional accomplishment. Indeed, in both categories he has my respect and admiration. However, I simply do not believe that Mr. Oberwetter possesses the proper experience to assume what has become one of the most important posts in our Nation's fight against terrorism. And while I will not stand in the way of Mr. Oberwetter's appointment, I believe it is important that the record show that the President's choice could certainly have been better.

Saudi Arabia is one of the primary battlegrounds in the war on terror. This is not simply because 15 of the 19 hijackers from 9/11 were Saudi. Top anti-terror officials tell us that Saudi Arabia is also a hub for terrorist financing and extremist incitement. The inflammatory content of its educational textbooks promotes anti-American sentiment in the Kingdom and its support for extremist madrassas schools in Pakistan, southeast Asia and Africa gives life to institutions that are incubators for the next generation of terrorists abroad.

Given this sad state of affairs, there are several reasons why Mr. Oberwetter should not be our nation's next Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. First, he has absolutely no official diplomatic or anti-terror experience. As I have said many times before, we live in a post-9/11 world where the old rules simply do not apply. Given that Saudi Arabia is one of the most important fronts in the war on terror, our top representative there can no longer be a run-of-the mill political appointee; rather, the American Ambassador to Saudi Arabia must be a seasoned diplomatic expert and someone with an extensive background in combating terrorist financing and religious extremism.

Mr. Oberwetter's more than 25 years as an oil industry insider provide him with no background to assume this key position in the fight against terrorism. Indeed, his oil industry pedigree is another reason why he is an inappropriate choice to serve as Ambassador. While I have no doubts about Mr. Oberwetter's personal integrity, his proximity to the oil industry suggests that commercial rather than security interests appear to have taken precedence in the administration's decision-making.

I simply do not understand this business-as-usual approach to diplomatic appointments when American lives are at stake. Surely there is someone more qualified than an oil executive that we could choose from the distinguished ranks of our Nation's diplomatic and security corps to occupy this impor-

tant post in the war on terror. Mr. Oberwetter's nomination is a dis-appointment and does a disservice to our national security.

ON YESTERDAY'S ATTACK IN MOSUL

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I express my outrage at events that transpired this weekend in Iraq. No one expects terrorists to follow the rules, but what they did to two soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division this weekend in Mosul is beyond the pale. We have lost 431 men and women in the conflict in Iraq; my heart goes out to the families and friends of each and every one.

Here is how the Associated Press describes what happened, as reported in *The Tennessean* and a number of other papers across the country:

Iraqi teenagers dragged two bloodied 101st Airborne soldiers from a wrecked vehicle and pummeled them with concrete blocks yesterday, witnesses said . . .

Witnesses to the Mosul attack said gunmen shot two soldiers driving through the city center, sending their vehicle crashing into a wall. The 101st Airborne Division said the soldiers were driving to another garrison.

About a dozen swarming teenagers dragged the soldiers out of the wreckage and beat them with concrete blocks, the witnesses said.

"They lifted a block and hit them with it on the face," Younis Mahmoud, 19, said.

It was unknown whether the soldiers were alive or dead when pulled from the wreckage.

That is what the Associated Press wrote. I ask unanimous consent the article be printed in full in the *RECORD* following my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. One can't help but feel a sense of anger when reading a story like that. CSM Jerry Wilson and SP Rel Ravago were on their way from one garrison to another. The terrorists laid waiting for the soldiers to drive by, and ambushed them. Even worse, they made every effort to be as brutal and bloody as possible. It makes me sick to my stomach.

At the same time, we also remember how many of our troops have lost their lives in this struggle. 431 men and women from our Armed Forces have given their lives since Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced. Forty-eight of them were from the 101st Airborne, based in Fort Campbell on the border of Kentucky and Tennessee. 2,067 have been wounded overall. And as much as we all wish it weren't the case, more will follow.

Nothing can prepare you for the loss of a loved one, especially loved ones as young as those that are serving our country in Iraq. We can only hope the knowledge that these soldiers died fighting to keep us safe will provide some comfort in this time of grief. To those families, we can only say this: the hopes and prayers of a grateful nation are with you.

But in the midst of this sorrow, we must remember why our troops are in Iraq. We must strengthen our resolve. Iraq is freer today than it has been for more than a generation. An evil dictator has been toppled, his regime is gone. The people of Iraq, by and large, are grateful; according to polls, the vast majority of them support continued American presence in their country.

In fact, in the horrible incident involving the two soldiers in Mosul, U.S. troops were alerted to the attack by sympathetic Iraqis.

We are making progress in Iraq: the power is on, schools are re-opened, markets are buzzing, the southern port is open. But danger lurks.

And we must labor on. A stable, democratic Iraq in the midst of the Middle East could become our greatest ally in the War on Terror. It would change the world. But if we give up and throw in the towel, an unstable Iraq would quickly become a hotbed of terrorism far worse than Afghanistan. The stakes are high. Failure is not an option.

Our troops and their families bear the burden of this cause more than any other. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

In a few days, we will celebrate Thanksgiving. In the first Thanksgiving proclamation, President George Washington "recommend[ed] to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, as a people, with devout reverence and affectionate gratitude."

Ours is a blessed nation, and we have much to be grateful for. This Thanksgiving we should be especially grateful for the men and women of our Armed Forces, fighting the terrorists over there so fewer can attack us here, at home. Whether helping to open a new school in Kirkuk or securing the area around Baghdad International Airport; our troops are standing in harms way. They are doing it for us.

For thousands of families, the Thanksgiving table will have an empty space this year. It will be hard. We should all save a place in our hearts for those military families this Thanksgiving. We give thanks for their courage, too.

So today, I say thank you to the men and women of our Armed Forces. We stand in awe of your strength. We are humbled by your sacrifice. We are grateful for your courage.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the *RECORD*, as follows:

[From the *TENNESSEAN*, Nov. 24, 2003]

TWO 101ST SOLDIERS DIE IN AMBUSH

MOSUL, IRAQ—Iraqi teenagers dragged two bloodied 101st Airborne soldiers from a wrecked vehicle and pummeled them with concrete blocks yesterday, witnesses said, describing the killings as a burst of savagery in a city once safe for Americans.